

THELMA WILBOURN

"It's like starting life
all over again"

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

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"IT'S LIKE STARTING LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN"

By Mrs. Thelma Wilbourn, Visitor, Alexander County Department of Public Aid

On September 18, 1951, Mr. Carter made application for Aid to Dependent Children in a southern Illinois county; the reason--loss of employment due to complete blindness. The family consisted of Mr. Carter, age 33, his wife, age 27, and his two sons, Ray, 10, and Thomas, 6. Mr. Carter had lost the sight of his right eye when at the age of ten he was struck by a stone thrown by a playmate. The eye was removed in 1945, and since then he has worn a glass eye.

Before the accident in June 1950, which took the sight of his good eye, Mr. Carter worked at various occupations, including three years of apprenticeship at Manteno State Hospital as a steamfitter. At the time of this accident, he was working for a plumbing and heating company in Champaign, Illinois. While he was at work, a piece of steel hit him in the left eye and within three days he was totally blind.

At that time, the Carters were living in Urbana, in a trailer home which had been purchased on a contract while Mr. Carter was working. The monthly payments of \$65 became delinquent after the accident, as the family was living on \$24 a week received from group insurance. In March 1951, they moved to their home county, to be near their relatives, and in October the balance of \$360 due on the trailer was refinanced by a southern Illinois bank to reduce the monthly payments to \$20. In November 1952, Mr. Carter began receiving Workmen's Compensation of \$103.75 a month, which was reduced in July 1956 to \$75 a month, the amount to be paid for the remainder of his life. His ADC grant was adjusted on the basis of his payments to meet the needs of the family.

Health Care

For several years past, Mr. Carter had been having trouble with his teeth and for some time had been treated by a local dentist. This dentist had given him a statement to carry with him addressed "To Whom It May Concern," explaining that Mr.

Carter "is a very free bleeder, probably from hereditary reasons," and that "he suffers recurrent secondary hemorrhages each time he has a scratch, cut, tooth extracted, etc." The dentist also explained that Mr. Carter's physician had treated Mr. Carter for this condition in preparing him for extractions. Both doctors recommended that all of his teeth should now be extracted as soon as possible and advised him to go to a large hospital where the facilities of all forms of coagulation were on hand and also a blood bank in case of emergency.

After consultation with the dentist and the County Medical Advisory Committee, an appointment for Mr. Carter was made in November 1952 through the efforts of the Pulaski County Department of Public Aid at Washington University Clinics, St. Louis, Missouri, for a complete physical examination and possible extractions of his teeth. In January 1953 he was admitted to Barnes Hospital there for hemophilia and extractions of teeth, and immediate treatments and blood transfusions were started. Inasmuch as he had a rare case of hemophilia and a rare type of blood, several specialists held consultations before making any decision. Mr. Carter reported that his case was under the direct supervision of four dental surgeons, four blood specialists, and three medical doctors. During this preparation Mr. Carter had several blood transfusions with a different reaction each time: extreme nervousness, violent shaking, and hives. The hospital secured some blood from professional donors in the St. Louis area, and the local newspaper in his home county ran an article requesting donors. Friends of Mr. Carter responded--13 from his home town, and others from nearer St. Louis. Within five months, Mr. Carter had made five trips to Barnes Hospital. The extractions were completed by December 1953.

In February 1954, the dental consultant at Barnes informed the Welfare Department in another southern county where the Carters were now living in a housing project,

The Carter family can truly be cited as an example of the plan the Illinois legislative body had in mind when the assistance programs were formulated. It is true not too large a percentage of those on the public assistance rolls have such a desire as Mr. Carter to become employable. With that factor, however, and the combined efforts of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the County Department of Public Aid, the return road to independent family living can be accomplished.--Author

that dentures for Mr. Carter were essential for his health and that the condition and structure of his mouth was such that dentures could be fitted successfully. The County Department got in touch with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to which Mr. Carter had been referred more than a year before to determine whether or not that agency would provide him with dentures. Necessary correspondence delayed action for about six months. In the meantime, Mr. Carter's friends in his former home made up a purse for the purchase of a Guide Dog and Mr. Carter's expenses to Columbus, Ohio, to train with the dog. However, this service and the dog were donated through the American Foundation for the Blind. Since his friends refused to let him return the money, he used it to pay for his dentures.

Rehabilitation Possibilities Surveyed

Mr. Carter had always shown interest in becoming rehabilitated. After losing his sight and before applying for public assistance, he explored the possibilities of finding something he could do. In the winter of 1950, an adult teacher of the blind, from the Illinois Division for the Blind, taught Mr. Carter Braille. Having learned to use a typewriter in high school, with a little practice, he was able

to do a fairly good job at typing. This has been a big help to him since losing his sight, he says, as he can type anything he wishes and then have his wife proofread it. Through the teacher of the blind, Mr. Carter was able to buy a Braille typewriter for only \$15.

When a patient in Barnes Hospital in 1953, Mr. Carter learned that the hospital employed three blind men to help in developing films in the dark room. That idea became food for thought. He wished that he could secure work at the hospital. He felt sure that he could fill the job if he were given the chance.

A visitor from the County Office talked with the Counselor for the Blind regarding further training for Mr. Carter. The counselor said, however, he had advised Mr. Carter at one time that he had been given all the instructions available and that before he could receive further training, he would have to move to a place where employment would be available. This Mr. Carter had not been willing to do. As to his securing work in Barnes Hospital's dark room, the counselor doubted that Mr. Carter would be able to find that kind of employment until he was trained for it.

Mr. Carter never lost faith in the possibility of rehabilitation. He kept in constant touch with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Foundation for the Blind, feeling sure that they would realize how much he wanted training which would enable him to support his family. At one time he was very much discouraged and felt the counselor was impatient with him because he had refused to learn to make brooms, weave baskets, and do leather work. He knew, however, that he could not make enough to support his family in this locality with this kind of training. He was also offered a course in piano tuning but he believed that too was not his line of work. He had been acquainted with a blind man living near Champaign, who had had this kind of training but was not getting enough work to meet his expenses. Mr. Carter felt that to acquire any of the above training would be a waste of time.

In February 1953, the Rehabilitation Counselor wrote to the County Department, "Mr. Carter was carefully considered for all possible services from this Division. Under date of January 19, 1953, the case was closed from the files of this office because it was decided that no suitable rehabilitation plan could

be developed in the foreseeable future."

Efforts by Recipient

Mr. Carter continued to search and explore all possibilities for a suitable field. In the spring of 1955, he made contact with Kaiser & Blair, Incorporated, an advertising company of Cincinnati, Ohio; the National Press Company, North Chicago; and the Superior Match Corporation, Chicago. He began taking orders for advertising specialties such as calendars, pencil kits, fans, ash trays, business cards, greeting cards, etc. For about 14 months business was fair to good, for at that time an atomic energy plant was being built nearby and his community had a little boom. For several months during that time Mr. Carter was able to earn enough so that his Aid to Dependent Children grant was suspended. It ended all too soon. When Mr. Carter found that his traveling expenses exceeded his income, he gave up this project. Instead of weakening because of this set-back, however, Mr. Carter busied himself by taking a free correspondence course in salesmanship psychology. He became a member of the Blind Association in Carbondale. Although he enjoyed the meetings, transportation (60 miles) was a problem and he had to quit going. Mr. Carter had a Bible in Braille, which he donated to the Association.

The Family at Home

The Carter's home reflected the unison and devotion of the family. Mrs. Carter was a wonderful housekeeper. The furnishings were modest, but the taste and color used in the curtains and upholstery and the arrangement of the furniture made the home beautiful and inviting. Not a room showed the slightest neglect. Neighbors marveled at Mr. Carter's ability to build what-not shelves, refinish furniture, and even do redecorating. Mrs. Carter and the boys helped wherever needed. One room of the apartment was used as a den for Mr. Carter and contained a long table which he built out of a plain door and black wrought iron legs. Finished in light wood and nicely waxed, this table held his typewriters and books. At one side was a file box with cards containing names and addresses typed on one side and the same information in Braille on the opposite side. These were in alphabetical order. Mr. Carter also had a large filing cabinet in which he kept his advertising matter and correspondence. It was an inspiration to visit the Carter home, for the love, admira-

tion, and appreciation shown for each other gave an atmosphere of happiness and contentment. Mrs. Carter said that when Mr. Carter lost his eyesight she was afraid he would become embittered and his kind personality would change. When he first returned home, she and the boys tried to make him feel that he was not handicapped and edged around any mention of his blindness. Mr. Carter, however, did not let his loss of sight and the great shock disrupt the home environment. Not wanting his wife and children to become affected by self-pity or despair, he became more considerate and devoted. So throughout, all members of the family have labored to keep their lives normal and happy, despite the many disappointments and reverses.

Renewed Efforts To Find a Job

In the spring of 1957, Mr. Carter talked to the visitor concerning a trip that he would like to make to Manteno to see if he could get employment as a dark room technician in the State Hospital there. He felt that since he had worked at the Hospital prior to losing his sight, he would know the surroundings well enough so that he could get about with little difficulty. As to training, if he could get the promise of a job, he could ask the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to pay for that. Expenses of the trip were also a problem as there were no funds available through the Aid to Dependent Children program. Mr. Carter said he had talked it over with his family and they were willing to make any sacrifice. Ray had worked on week-ends the previous month in a local store and it was agreed that this was to be considered available income to meet the needs of the family. Mr. Carter was to be permitted, therefore, to use the income from Ray's employment for the trip to Manteno.

As Mr. Carter later reported to the County Office, he had gone first to Kankakee and talked to the president of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, telling his plans and asking for help. The union president was sure that he could help; he had a good friend who was influential and with whom he would discuss the problem. He assured Mr. Carter that there was a good possibility of this person's helping him to find a job and he promised to call Mr. Carter later. Quite hopeful, Mr. Carter "sweated out" another two weeks, waiting for that call. It came. The union president

said he had talked with his friend and been told that he could have Mr. Carter placed within two weeks after he completed his training as a dark room technician. Excited and happy Mr. Carter immediately called the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, who in turn made a survey of the hospitals where Mr. Carter could be enrolled as a student. At the first place, St. Frances' Hospital in Peoria, it turned out that they had as many students as they could accommodate at that time. Mr. Carter decided that he would make some inquiries on his own. He called on the X-ray technician of the St. Mary's Hospital in Cairo. The technician agreed to teach Mr. Carter; Division of Vocational Rehabilitation agreed to finance Mr. Carter's training; and the training began in August 1957. By the first of October 1957, Mr. Carter was ready for the promised job.

Trained But Not Hired

A relative took Mr. Carter to Kankakee, where he was advised to apply at the Manteno State Hospital. As the superintendent was on vacation, Mr. Carter talked to an assistant superintendent and the chief technician. Both thought it was a splendid idea; so Mr. Carter made his application. They promised him he would hear from them in a short time. After waiting until January 1958 and receiving no response, he again made a trip to the Manteno State Hospital and then to the Kankakee State Hospital. At both places he was told that they could not hire him--that they had no openings. Another reason was that they didn't want a blind person.

Mr. Carter returned home crushed. The visitor groped for words to encourage and to give him a reason to hope for something, or another chance. At least he had the training and would be placed if and when the opportunity arose. Mr. Carter showed considerable strain. The disappointment was almost too much for him. Even Mrs. Carter suffered nervous attacks and was hospitalized for a stomach disorder. The big question in Mr. Carter's mind and one which he asked the visitor many times was: Why was the State unwilling to help him secure a job or teach him a trade where he could earn his livelihood, rather than sit down and draw public assistance?

The Counselor for the Blind in Division of Vocational Rehabilita-



MRS. WILBOURN

tion called on the Carter family very often, which was a great consolation to them. Often Mr. Carter called the visitor at the office or at her home. He needed encouragement, which talking to the visitor seemed to give him. In order to divert him from his own troubles and give him a feeling of being needed and of use, the visitor introduced him to another blind recipient, who lived a short distance from his home. This man had been a patient a short time in the Anna State Hospital and he too needed someone to give him encouragement and to bolster up his spirits--someone who could meet him on the same level. It was good for both. Mr. Carter was a sympathetic listener and they visited each other every day or two. They walked about the streets of the housing project where they lived and found they had much in common. Mr. Carter interested this friend in the book machine and often read to him. The man steadily improved for the better, and Mr. Carter had the feeling that he had accomplished something.

The Carters borrowed a car from relatives, and Mrs. Carter took her husband to see the superintendent at the Anna State Hospital about a job there. He was told that there was none but that the superintendent would make inquiry of the larger hospitals upstate and let Mr. Carter know if there was need for a dark room technician. Mr. Carter had a brother from Kansas City visiting in Cairo. He went home with his brother and they made contact with 11 hospitals but had no success. While Mr. Carter was there, he made application with the Bureau of the Blind, a job placement bureau operated by the State of Missouri. He never heard from them after he came home.

Job Possibility Appears

In the spring of 1958, the Counselor of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation called Mr. Carter from Carbondale. He had a placement for a dark room technician in the Carle's Hospital Clinic in Urbana and wanted to know if Mr. Carter would go there if he could get the job. Of course, Mr. Carter was ready to take the job. The counselor made an appointment for him with the head doctor.

At the same time, the visitor was spending a few days in the home of her daughter and family in Champaign. One evening in a TV program, Mr. Nugent, Head Counselor of the Handicapped at the University of Illinois, was giving a talk. The visitor's son-in-law called her attention to the program and told her of the wonderful work Mr. Nugent was doing. Immediately, the visitor made a telephone call to Mr. Nugent and told him about Mr. Carter. Mr. Nugent seemed quite interested; he said he would be glad to talk to Mr. Carter and try to help him any time that arrangements could be made for him to come to Champaign.

As soon as the visitor returned home, she got in touch with Mr. Carter and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. A short time afterward, the counselor made an appointment for Mr. Carter to meet with Dr. Gianturco at Carle's Hospital. Transportation for Mr. and Mrs. Carter to Champaign was again the stumbling block, as neither the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation nor the Illinois Public Aid Commission had funds for this purpose. After several contacts, the local Elks' Club arranged to provide not only the transportation but expenses for the Carter's stay in Urbana. At the Carle's Hospital, Mr. Carter was told by Dr. Gianturco that a new wing was being constructed on the hospital and that it would include a new dark room. Mr. Carter was told that he could start working as soon as he could find living quarters or could wait until the new dark room was completed. Calls were made to real estate offices but the Carters could not locate any place within their finances.

While in Champaign, Mr. and Mrs. Carter went to the office of Mr. Nugent at the University of Illinois (with whom the visitor had already talked). In describing his visit there, Mr. Carter said he had never been so elated. He and his wife were received most graciously. There was no hurried conversation or

"brush-off"; Mr. Nugent treated them as if nothing else on his busy calendar was more important. He heard Mr. Carter's story and wondered if the family would be able to live on the low salary the hospital was offering. He suggested that Mr. Carter use his knowledge of plumbing and try to find a job in that field, as it would probably pay considerably more. Several shops were contacted including the one where he was working when he lost his sight; and his former employer promised to let him know in about two weeks.

Waiting

Again the Carters returned to their home, confident that it was only a short time before Mr. Carter would go to work. The pro and con of the jobs combined with the housing questions and the distance of 250 miles from home base was food for considerable thought.

In a few days, the Counselor from Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was in Mr. Carter's town and Mr. Carter discussed the job situation with him. The counselor encouraged Mr. Carter to take the work at the hospital if he could find a place to live and wrote to a counselor in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Champaign County, about help in finding housing for the Carters. The Champaign counselor learned that the Carle hospital board had decided to wait until the new dark room was completed before hiring a technician and that this probably would be about July 1959.

After receiving this word, Mr. Carter was left wondering if he had lost out again. In a few days, however, he reported to the visitor that he had received a letter from Dr. Gianturco, explaining the decision of the board and asking Mr. Carter to let him know later if he would be interested in working in the new dark room. Mr. Carter immediately replied that he would be interested and would look forward to working there as soon as the dark room was completed. This time the reverses were for the best, as Mr. Carter had more time to secure housing and Ray, now 17, who was graduating from high school in June 1959, could be making plans for his own future.

Ray's Plans

For some time during home visits Ray's future plans had been discussed. His grades were good and he was hoping to get into some higher field of education. He could not go

to college because there were no resources to supplement any part-time work he might secure. Not very strong and small in stature, Ray could consider only training requiring little strength. During the last term of school each year, pamphlets and talks are given to the students desiring vocational training. Ray wanted to go into medicine; but since that required too many years of study, he decided to be an X-ray technician. In November 1958, when Mr. Carter was in Urbana, he talked to the head of the X-ray school at Carle Clinic about his son. The doctor told him the chances for Ray to be accepted for training in that clinic were very slim as there could be only one student in 1959. If Ray's grades were in the upper one third of his class, however, his application could be taken.

During the 1958 Christmas vacation, Ray sent in his application and the last of February 1959, he was called to Urbana for a personal interview. At that time he was told that he would be accepted for training beginning July 1, 1959. It is a long course--three years with three months' probation and he must buy textbooks and uniforms. Beginning September 1, 1959, however, he will receive \$100 a month pay.

More Problems Solved

The housing situation was solved more easily and quickly than had been anticipated. The Administrator of the Housing Authority in Mr. Carter's home county called the Administrator of the Housing Authority in Champaign and recommended the Carter family highly. As a result, on June 22 the Carters were notified that an apartment would be available July 6. Mr. Carter and the county welfare department at once made arrangements to meet the moving expenses. An ironical touch to the situation came when the truck Mr. Carter had engaged burned up, and he had to find another mover to take the furniture.

A final important problem remained to be solved--finding a new home for Taffy, the faithful, devoted Guide Dog. Mr. Carter felt he could not use her in going back and forth to the hospital and would have no place for her to stay while he was working. The Foundation for the Blind advised him that Taffy was too old to be trained to serve another person. Several local people asked for her, but as they had children, Mr. Carter was afraid Taffy might not tolerate their playing around her. A friend of the

Carters who lives in the country offered to try Taffy out at her home and report on the dog's adjustment to the new living conditions. The first week the friend called to say that Taffy was "lost" and required considerable petting and understanding. She was taken on walks about the farm, however, and a few days later was able to make tours by herself and was becoming as playful as a puppy. It relieved Mr. Carter to know that she was contented.

The Final Move

Preparations went on for moving. Several times Mr. Carter called the visitor when questions arose that had not seemed pertinent before. How long would assistance continue? How would he make the security payment required by the Champaign County Housing Project? How would the expense of Ray's textbooks and extra clothing be met? All this seemed to loom up at one time and was rather frightening. Mr. Carter wondered too what would happen to his family if he moved into Urbana, and things did not go as planned.

The visitor tried to impress upon him that he could always reapply for assistance in that county if he felt that he could not meet his needs, and he would always end by saying, "Well, we have worked so long trying to become self-supporting that we are not going to look back now. Ray will be getting his training and I will have my work." Mrs. Carter also planned to secure work as soon as Thomas, the younger boy, started to school in the fall. As for meeting the expense of Ray's textbooks and extra clothing, a person, anonymous to the county department, furnished the money, which was taken to the Carters just before they left on July 5. An allowance was made by the county department to pay for the railroad tickets to Champaign with Mr. Carter, because of his blindness, traveling with a companion for half-fare.

On the Job

Letters from the Carters express their deep appreciation for the help that has been given to their family. Their furniture arrived in Urbana without even a scratch they reported. The apartment is very pretty and is located across the street from a park which they already have begun to enjoy. It was a wonderful feeling, Mr. Carter wrote, for him and Ray to be going to work together. "All that we have looked forward to is shaping into a reality; it is like starting life all over again."

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